

BELLEVUE NETWORK ON AGING
REGULAR MEETING
MINUTES

April 2, 2009
8:30 a.m.

Bellevue City Hall
Room 1E -121

MEMBERS PRESENT: Lynne Robinson, Berta Seltzer, Dwayne Dilley, Diana Thompson, Howard Katz, Gary Dickerman, Bill Merriman, Jullie Gray, Bob Megargel, Heidi Ressler, Marjorie Todd, Hannah Kimball

MEMBERS ABSENT: Eileen Rasnack

STAFF PRESENT: Cathy VonWald, Department of Parks and Community Services

OTHERS PRESENT: Warren Lai, Human Services, Cheryl Cohen, Neighborhood Mediation Program

RECORDING SECRETARY: Gerry Lindsay

WELCOME AND ROLL CALL

The meeting was called to order at 8:37 a.m. by Chair Robinson who presided. All committee members were present with the exception of Eileen Rasnack who was excused.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A. March 5, 2009

Motion to approve the agenda was made by Ms. Seltzer. Second was by Mr. Merriman and the motion carried unanimously.

PRESENTATION

A. City of Bellevue Mediation Program

Cheryl Cohen explained that the mediation program began in 1996 with all volunteers. She said she has been with the program since its inception and for the last three years has been paid to do the work. In all there are 22 dispute resolution centers in the state, of which Bellevue is one. The Bellevue program is the only one run within a city organization and the only one that offers its services for free.

The three main programs are the neighborhood mediation program, the parent/teen mediation program, and the elder mediation program. All of the services are provided by trained volunteers who receive 40 hours of training, then work the phones once a week in two- to four-hour shifts for six months to a year, then move into a practicum for a year where they observe mediation and serve as a mediation intern, and only then become full mediators.

Ms. Cohen said the program is confidential. The only thing that can be released is the agreement signed by the parties. The program does not handle any divorce or family related mediation. All of the services are primarily provided at City Hall because it is a neutral

setting, though some of the elder meditation services have been provided in private homes and at senior centers. The program is only available to people who live, work or go to school in Bellevue. Anyone not meeting those qualifications are referred to the King County mediation program.

Ms. Cohen said about 700 calls are handled annually by the program. Of those, only about ten percent go to mediation. Of the ten percent, about 75 percent result in a written agreement at the end of the mediation. The balance end in either a verbal agreement or with no agreement at all. Some 35 conciliations are conducted annually over the phone.

Many of the elder mediation cases involve decisions about where to house loved ones so they can be cared for properly; distribution of caregiving responsibilities; safety concerns; health concerns; wills and estates; major life transitions that result in conflict; and strained family relationships.

The range of services offered include problem solving, conciliation and mediation. Problem solving involves working with the person who calls in a complaint about a neighbor to help them resolve the problem themselves; in the majority of cases, the caller is empowered to find a solution. Conciliation is a process under which the mediator agrees to make contact on behalf of the caller.

If conciliation does not succeed, the issue moves to mediation, which involves getting the caller and the neighbor in the same room together with a mediator. Each party is afforded ample opportunity to tell their side of the story without interruption. The mediators serve as completely neutral parties and they do not make any decisions for either party; they are trained to put aside their own biases. Ultimately, the solutions are crafted by the parties involved, not the mediators.

Ms. Cohen said the role of the mediator is very powerful in the parent/teen mediation situations. The program involves an adult and a teen who have been trained as mediators along with a parent and another teen. The teen party does not feel ganged up on by adults and the outcome is nearly always positive because the teen has an equal say in determining what the final decision should be.

Answering a question asked by Mr. Katz, Ms. Cohen said one of the criteria for people coming to mediation is they must have the capacity. In some mediations involving elders, the mediator has questioned whether the elder is capable of seeking resolution and then abiding by the final agreement. She explained that a follow-up session is conducted three months after concluding a meditation. In most cases the mediation at least gets the neighbors talking to each other, even if the agreements are not followed to the letter.

Ms. Cohen said the elder mediation program began with a call from an elder law attorney who indicated he had been receiving more and more cases involving elders and family relationships, financial and property issues. The elder mediation sessions can involve family members as well as attorneys, care managers, financial managers or guardians. Attorneys generally act as advisors or observers and do not participate specifically in the sessions or the outcomes. As with other mediations, the intent is to get to the underlying interests of all parties involved. Often it is all about respect, trust and communication. The process is cooperative rather than adversarial, and the individual parties ultimately control the outcomes.

Mr. Dickerman asked how issues such as a threat to commit suicide during a teen/parent session are handled if everything is held confidential. Ms. Cohen said the parties must sign a consent to agree form under which anything having to do with safety issues is reportable. She stressed that prior to any mediation session there is a great deal of background work done with

the individual parties. If a parent calls to say their child is depressed and has mentioned suicide, the person taking the call will suggest that what is needed is counseling and will offer resources. Cases of child abuse or elder abuse are not taken on by the mediation program. If a legal issue arises during a mediation session, the mediators can stop the session immediately and take the appropriate steps.

Answering a question asked by Mr. Katz, Ms. Cohen said there have been cases accepted which involved disputes with the city. Because the mediation staff in fact work for the city, in certain cases referrals are made to another dispute resolution center that works with government entities.

Ms. Ressler asked if the mediators have to on occasion bring in interpreters to address language barriers. Ms. Cohen said interpreters are frequently used, and every attempt is made to make sure those brought into the training program have diverse language backgrounds. The interpreters used are first trained in mediation. Family members are never used as interpreters.

Mr. Megargel asked if the service area includes Clyde Hill and Medina. Ms. Cohen allowed that it does.

Mr. Megargel asked if an elderly person who does not otherwise meet the requirements of living or working in Bellevue could qualify for the mediation program if they attend church in Bellevue. Ms. Cohen said she recently sent a large number of letters out to churches and nursing homes outlining the mediation program and offering it to those who need it. Presentations were made at a couple of churches. While technically simply attending church in Bellevue does not qualify a person for admittance into the program, every attempt is made to be flexible.

Chair Robinson said in her professional job as an in-home physical therapist she is constantly running into dysfunctional families. She said had she known previously about the program she would have already made dozens of referrals. She asked if those in the social work communities have been informed about the program. Ms. Gray said often social workers will work with families in trying to resolve disputes. Where a resolution cannot be found because the parties are not willing to work with each other, it is unlikely the parties would agree to go to elder mediation.

Ms. Cohen agreed the mediation program could be better advertised to social workers.

The Network members were informed that all of the mediations are co-mediations, meaning there are always two mediators involved. The model provides for balancing gender, age, and race.

The teens who receive training in the program are started out their freshman year in high school. That way they will be in the program for four years. Most of the referrals come from high school counselors or probation officers, and there has not been a huge volume of cases; at times it has been difficult to keep the mediators busy. Each mediation involves two mediators, and two mediators in training who observe the process.

Ms. Gray asked if the program is currently recruiting older adults. Ms. Cohen said the training session that was just recently completed included four retired persons.

MAINTENANCE

A. PR/Outreach

1. Update

Chair Robinson said she and Mr. Dickerman recently attended the Vuecrest Community Association meeting, and also participated in some community conversations that are part of updating the needs assessment.

2. Plans for Future Outreach

Ms. VonWald said the Lake Hills Community Association is interested in having the Network give a presentation on resources, probably in July or October. The Carlyle Condominium Association has also expressed interest in having a presentation.

Ms. VonWald said the Strawberry Festival is scheduled for June 27 and 28; in 2008 the Network had a table. The Fourth of July event always include a city table which the Network can share with the parks department. The Northwest Senior Games are slated primarily for the weekend of June 6 and 7, though some of the events will continue into July. She said she would keep her ear to the ground for other community events.

Ms. VonWald informed the group that the Power Point presentation has been revised to be up to date. She said she would be happy to provide some training to anyone interested in going out to neighborhood groups on behalf of the Network.

B. Regional Partnerships

Chair Robinson thanked Mr. Katz for setting up the presentation made by state Attorney General Rob McKenna. Mr. Katz suggested that written minutes or a full transcript of the presentation should be created, but Ms. VonWald pointed out that funding to do so is very limited. The event was taped for broadcast on BTV, and the on-air times will be promoted.

Mr. Katz said he would try to get Mr. McKenna to come back every year. It was agreed that a letter of thanks from the Network should be drafted by Mr. Katz and sent to Mr. McKenna.

C. Legislative Issues

Mr. Katz said it will be very important to track the legislative issues affecting older adults in the state. Ms. VonWald agreed and suggested the Network should learn more about the senior lobby, an organization that is entirely focused on senior issues pending before the legislature.

Ms. Gray said the Kirkland Senior Council had a very good training session on how to talk with legislators. The session was videotaped and made available to the community. Ms. VonWald said she could arrange to have the person who gave that presentation to come to the Network along with a representative from the Senior Lobby.

Mr. Katz suggested the Network should hear directly from the legislators who represent Bellevue.

Ms. Thompson urged every Network member to correspond with their legislators on an individual basis. She said she would be happy to compose a letter addressing the issue of chore services for the Network to sign and send. It was suggested that Eileen Rasnack draft the letter because she is keenly aware of the issue.

Motion to direct Eileen Rasnack to compose and send to the appropriate legislators a letter addressing the issue of chore services was made by Mr. Dickerman. Second was by Mr. Katz and the motion carried unanimously.

Ms. VonWald said during her tenure as a member of the City Council of Woodinville the Council held an annual meeting with legislators. She suggested that hosting an open house at City Hall annually would be a good way let seniors make direct contact with their legislators.

Chair Robinson suggested giving the task of organizing an annual meet and greet with legislators to a subcommittee of the Network.

D. Presentation of Award

Chair Robinson took a moment to bestow upon Ms. VonWald the annual Golden Oldie award for outstanding Network on Aging leadership. Mr. Dickerman pointed out that the competitive field made it very difficult to select a winner. Chair Robinson explained that the nominating committee had worked diligently for months determining candidates for the award and agreed on the choice of Ms. VonWald because of her diligence in putting into action the ideas of the Network members; for accomplishing the workload of ten world leaders; and for being an excellent snowboarder and all-around great person.

Ms. VonWald received her trophy with proper aplomb. She said working with the Network has reenergized her enthusiasm for working with Bellevue's older adults.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

A. Advocacy/Housing & Mobility

Mr. Dilley reported that the subcommittee is keeping involved in the Bel-Red corridor issue. A copy of the letter sent to the Planning Commission regarding housing issues in the corridor was cc'd to the City Council.

The letter sent to the Housing Trust Fund received a response from Fred Jarrett, a state senator in the 41st District. Mr. Dilley read to the Network the response from Senator Jarrett in which he acknowledged his support for the Housing Trust Fund and pointed out that the state is facing a most difficult economic challenge without a clear indication of how to contend with the challenges. Senator Jarrod added that the loss of between 20 and 25 percent of state revenues will have serious impacts that will require thoughtful and compassionate action.

Mr. Dilley said there has been discussion about putting together a list of housing affordable to seniors. There are some similar lists out there, but none of them are comprehensive. The subcommittee believes the development of such a list should wait until after ARCH Director Arthur Sullivan addresses the Network in July.

With regard to mobility, Mr. Dilley said the subcommittee talked about the Easy Rider Collaborative and where it stands currently. The Bus Buddy video is now available online.

The issue of transportation from the two hospitals was discussed and may be an avenue to be pursued.

Mr. Katz suggested that once NE 10th Street is opened between Group Health and Overlake Hospital, the new corridor will better connect the medical campuses with the downtown. It would make perfect sense for the circulator to utilize the route and include the hospitals.

Ms. VonWald pointed out that the city advocated for including the hospital campuses, but King County Metro had a different view, claiming that to do so would be very expensive.

Mr. Dickerman commented that Rapid Ride will operate on the other side of the freeway. Metro believes the solution will be to use a combination of the circulator and Rapid Ride to access the hospital. Metro controls the routes, not the city. Ms. VonWald added that in the long term light rail will link the downtown with the hospital.

Mr. Dilley reported that because of the number of subcommittee members who are participating in revising the Needs Update, the issues raised during the process will be brought to the table for discussion to determine if there are subjects of interest for the subcommittee to get involved with.

B. Research/Needs Assessment

Ms. Gray said Human Services Planner Alex O'Reilly provided the subcommittee with a brief facilitator training session on March 20. Three community conversations followed during the month of March that involved Network members. Additional community conversations are planned for the month of April.

C. Education/Safety & Support

Ms. Ressler said the subcommittee took the time to thank Mr. Katz for setting up the presentation by Rob McKenna. The group also discussed upcoming community events at which the Network could be represented, and the notion of having a monthly column in the *Bellevue Reporter* covering issues related to safety, education and support of elders. With regard to the latter, the group believes the piece should be short, positive, and always end with a tip. Ms. Ressler will follow up with the Bellevue Reporter.

Motion to allow the subcommittee to pursue the project of having a monthly column in the *Bellevue Reporter* was made by Ms. Ressler. Second was by Mr. Katz and the motion carried unanimously.

Ms. Ressler said one of the projects the group thought it could invest in would be having an informational bookmark on Elder abuse paired with a magnet having the same information that could be kept on a fridge door. They could be included in general mailers and could be made available at events for people to take home.

Ms. VonWald said she has the graphics staff working on the bookmark and would price out the magnet option.

STAFF REPORT

Ms. VonWald said she recently received in the mail a co-housing workbook; she suggested housing subcommittee might want to review it. She added that she would make it part of the Network library.

The Network is on the City Council agenda for May 4 at 8:00 p.m. for the Older Americans Month proclamation. The format will be the same as it was in 2008 except that no time will be taken to outline the Network's workplan; that will be covered in a written report to the Council.

Chair Robinson informed the Network that because she is a member of the Park Board she provides a brief monthly update regarding what the Network is doing.

Ms. VonWald reported that every city department has been asked to cut up to ten percent of their budgets. Initially that will be accomplished through efficiencies; there have been no staff layoffs. Discretionary spending has been eliminated, as has out-of-state travel and travel that involves an overnight stay. Programs will only be carried out when they meet the minimum number of participants. The summer and fall editions of the *Connections* brochure listing Parks classes and activities for the department will be combined; that alone will save the city about \$25,000. Staff vacancies will not be filled, at least for a while.

Continuing, Ms. VonWald said the city is working to develop a recession response plan for City residents. Because of the economic situation, a number of people who have not previously had issues with finances or other difficulties, and thus have not had a need for social services, are finding themselves in need now. A team of city employees has been formed to put together a plan. It will involve getting information out to the public about available resources and how to access them. A large part of the focus will be on neighbors helping neighbors, spearheaded by the Neighborhood Liaison Program.

Mr. Dilley observed that in Europe many seniors are opting not to sell their properties and move into retirement centers because of the level of depreciation in the value of their properties. He suggested that a similar thing might be occurring in Bellevue.

Chair Robinson said some have mentioned advocating for property tax breaks for seniors.

NEW BUSINESS

Mr. Katz said he recently spoke with Parks Director Patrick Foran who allowed that there is a need for a senior-type facility in the downtown. Mr. Katz said he suggested that a senior facility could easily be incorporated into the same building as the swimming pool that is being considered.

PUBLIC COMMENTS/QUESTIONS – None

UPCOMING AGENDA ITEMS

Ms. VonWald discussed with the Network the list of upcoming agenda items.

ADJOURN

Chair Robinson adjourned the meeting at 10:32 a.m.